

SESSION 7

A LOVE FOR OTHERS

Leader pages on pp. 156-159

THE POINT:
WE ARE TO LOVE OTHERS
AS GOD LOVES US.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13

¹ If I speak human or angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

² If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing.

³ And if I give away all my possessions, and if I give over my body in order to boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

.....
⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant,

⁵ is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs.

⁶ Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth.

⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

.....
⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

⁹ For we know in part, and we prophesy in part,

¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will come to an end.

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put aside childish things. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know fully, as I am fully known.

¹³ **Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love — but the greatest of these is love.**

MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Love (v. 1)— In this verse and describes God's unconditional love, *agape*, for believers. It is the type of love believers are to have for one another.

The perfect comes (v. 10)—The perfected kingdom of Christ that Jesus will consummate when He returns to put an end to sin and death.

I will know fully (v. 12)— By saying that he would know "fully" Paul was not saying that he will know God exhaustively. Paul was teaching that our sin nature will no longer hinder our understanding of God ("now we see only a reflection as in a mirror"), and we will instead know God as He is ("face to face").

WHY DO YOU THINK LOVE IS ESSENTIAL FOR CHRISTIANS?

When an epidemic hit the Roman Empire around 260 AD, it was horribly bad. The only thing people could do to avoid getting sick and dying was to run away, literally. Dionysius, a third-century bishop, wrote this about "the heathen."

"At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled from their dearest, throwing them into the roads before they were dead and treated unburied corpses as dirt, hoping thereby to avert the spread and contagion of the fatal disease."

Christians, on the other hand, took a wholly different approach. Dionysius wrote, "Most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty... They took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease... Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their deaths to themselves and died in their stead."³⁴

A major key difference between Christians and those of other faiths is the expression of love and the willingness to love unconditionally, faithfully, no matter what. In this final session, we will see how we are to love even as Christ has loved us.

Love is Foundational to Everything We Do

// 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

The love chapter. We commonly hear it quoted at weddings and see it cross-stitched and framed at someone's house. No doubt it is an incredible piece of prose, but too often it's read with a focus on romantic love or family connections. Paul's words go much deeper than that, and to see that, we must keep it in its context. In the previous chapter, Paul addressed the matter of spiritual gifts and how church members were playing one gift against another. In chapter 14, Paul addressed the specific practice of certain gifts. And right between chapters 12 and 14 is a little "side trip" to talk about love. But this is no side trip or digression!

To properly exercise our spiritual gifts, Paul stressed the critical importance of love in the use of those gifts. That's why he closed chapter 12 with "But desire the greater gifts. And I will show you an even better way." Love is that better way. Let's not stop there, though. Love, as we will see, is defined in vv. 4-7, addressed each of the problems and issues the Corinthian church was struggling with. Paul had been building up to this climax we see in chapter 13.



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Paul was clear in what kind of love he was referring to. In our culture, we often use love in a sexual or romantic sense, a form of love the Greeks called eros. Paul was not using this Greek word, which carries the idea of a self-pleasing love. Nor did Paul use the word, phileo. Phileo could be defined as brotherly love, and unfortunately, we often treat it as an inferior love compared to agape love. There is nothing inferior about it. Phileo is the word used for the Father's love for Jesus (John 5:20), God's love for an individual believer (John 16:27), and Jesus's love for a disciple (John 20:2).

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul used the word agape, which denotes a love that is unconditional. It's a love that seeks the highest good of the other person. It's a love that is willing to lay aside any personal comfort or benefits for the sake of the one loved. While phileo and agape both capture aspects of God's love for us, agape is the type of love we are called to exhibit toward God. The call to follow Jesus is a call to die to self (Luke 9:23). We give our lives in love to Him. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Saying we love Jesus isn't enough. It must be seen in our actions. Our love for Jesus is seen in how we love others, and that love is seen in the way we minister and serve. The exercise of our spiritual gifts must be grounded in love. As examples, Paul pointed to five spiritual gifts—tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, and giving (sacrifice). The exercise of these gifts does no good if love is not present.

Many of the Corinthians highly valued speaking in languages, even considering it a superior gift. Paul lifted up greater gifts, but for his example, he said the use of languages, whether speaking eloquently in other languages or even speaking as an angel would speak, was just a lot of noise if not practiced with love. But even the greater gifts like prophecy, knowledge, and faith are fruitless if they're not grounded in love for God and a love for others. It would seem that the type of sacrifices and hardship mentioned in verse 3 could only be embraced when love was present, but such acts can be done begrudgingly and unwillingly. Without love, nothing will ever be gained.

HOW DOES OUR CULTURE'S VIEW OF LOVE FALL SHORT OF GOD'S VIEW?

Love Reflects the Character of Christ

// 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

After highlighting the critical need for and importance of love in all we do as we exercise our spiritual gifts, Paul gave us a concrete picture of what love is—and what love isn't. Our culture lifts high the biblical injunction to love one another, but the meaning the world gives to that sentiment is often vague. People love the idea



DIGGING DEEPER THE HEART

While the heart is associated with romantic love, the biblical concept of "heart" ³⁵ (Hebrew *léb*; Greek *kardia*) appears approximately 1,000 times in Scripture, with meanings that extend beyond the physical organ that pumps blood and carries oxygen. It encompasses the inner self of intellectual, emotional, volitional, and moral dimensions.

- Intellectually, the heart perceives, understands, and remembers.
- Emotionally, it experiences joy, sorrow, love, fear, and anger.
- Volitionally, it purposes, inclines, and chooses.
- Morally, it can be pure or evil, faithful or deceitful.

Scripture describes the heart as naturally evil, yet it is also good and serves as our conscience. The heart represents one's hidden core, known fully to God. Religiously, the heart is central. It is where God dwells, divine knowledge resides, and our transformation occurs. God promises to renew hardened hearts so that we will have a true, authentic relationship with Him.

Will you allow God to cleanse and renew your heart?

of love, but it's usually on their own terms. In other words, we love others until they're not lovable. These verses don't give us the freedom to pick and choose what it means to love.

Patient. We can be thankful that God, in His love, is patient with us! Patience may seem passive because we don't necessarily react to an offense like we want, but patience is not the same as indifference. It's bearing with an offense without ignoring it.

Kind. Our patience is to be paired with kindness. Patience—that longsuffering perseverance in the face of an offense—may appear to outsiders as doing nothing, but kindness brings in the action. However the person treated us, we don't respond in kind, but we respond with kindness!

Does not envy. In squabbling over leadership (chap. 1), lawsuits (chap. 6), and their divisions during the Lord's Supper (chap. 11), the Corinthians were not showing love to one another. "For since there is envy and strife among you, are you not worldly and behaving like mere humans?" (3:3).

Is neither boastful nor arrogant. Throughout this letter, Paul called out their arrogance and pride. We don't need to cover up our accomplishments or avoid compliments, but love means we refuse to exalt ourselves over others.

Is neither rude nor self-seeking. Rudeness goes deeper than our culture defines it. The Greek word referred to shameful behavior. To love as Jesus loves calls us to always seek what's best for the other person.

Is not irritable and does not keep a record of wrongs. Instead of angrily holding on to offenses, we are to forgive. "Above all, maintain constant love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8).

Finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in truth. We are not to be happy when others stumble; instead, we are to rejoice when others are living according to the truth. Unfortunately, the Corinthians were boasting about the sinful behavior of one of their church members (1 Cor. 5:1-8) When we love, we'll encourage others to see the truth and live by it.

Bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things.

To bear and endure all things in love speaks to the present, and to believe and hope in love speaks to our future, which is secure in Christ. We never lose faith, and we never lose hope because of Christ.

We are to be like Jesus. Admittedly, it can be hard to live up to Jesus's loving example, but when we remember this is the very way He loves us, we can let His love overflow through us. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

WHAT DOES THIS DESCRIPTION OF LOVE TEACH US ABOUT GOD'S CHARACTER?



Love Never Fails

// 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

Paul ended verse 7 with the statement that love endures all things, and the enduring nature of this love is what Paul now addressed in verses 8-13. "Love never ends." What will come to an end is the need for spiritual gifts. Let's keep in mind the context: the church had apparently been arguing over the merit of some gifts over others. Paul had already addressed the value and need for all the gifts, and he began this chapter by pointing out that, without love, gifts like tongues, prophecy, and knowledge are pointless. He now pointed to these same gifts, highlighting their temporary nature.

These aren't the only spiritual gifts that will cease, but because of the emphasis the Corinthian

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church gave to these, he used them to point to the temporal nature of gifts.

All this will change for us “when the perfect comes.” While many contend that “the perfect” refers to the completion of the New Testament, others see the perfect as a reference to the return of Christ when He sets up His perfect, eternal kingdom. It’s important to keep in mind that Paul isn’t dealing solely with the question of when the gift of languages will cease, but he’s using these three highly-touted gifts as examples to show that we won’t need these gifts—or any of the spiritual gifts—when we are face-to-face with Jesus in His kingdom.

When perfection arrives, though, love will still be present. For that reason, even now, our focus should be on maintaining and exercising love, regardless of what spiritual gifts we have. So, what remains? Faith, hope, and love. Faith is needed because it’s our faith in Christ that brings us to salvation. Hope is tied to our faith, in that it is our trust-filled and confident expectation of what awaits us in Christ. But love sits over and above it all. Faith and hope are gifts God gives us, but love is His very nature. “God is love” (1 John 4:16). Therefore, “the greatest of these is love.”

HOW CAN AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE SHAPE THE WAY WE LOVE OTHERS TODAY?

DID YOU KNOW?

The way Christians love one another is a radical love that changes lives and communities. Jesus did not propose this as a suggestion; it was a characteristic that would distinguish His followers from the rest of the world. Throughout history, critics have been won over by encountering Christians who demonstrated unconditional love and forgave the unforgivable, rather than through theological arguments. When Christians lead mission trips for disaster relief, establish hospitals in remote villages, adopt society’s forgotten children, and love across racial and economic divides, the world stops and pays attention. This divine love flows through transformed hearts. It is an unconditional, supernatural love that cannot be manufactured through human effort alone, but only through the Holy Spirit and obedience to Jesus.

Biblical Truth: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

How does your radical love help those watching from the outside?

LIVE IT

Since we are to love others as God loves us, how will you live out that truth this week?

Nike has a slogan that says, “Just Do It.” Love is a verb and becomes real when it moves beyond feelings into action. There are numerous opportunities to demonstrate Christ’s love through simple acts of selflessness. Whether it’s helping a neighbor with groceries, listening without judgment to a friend, or serving at your youth center, genuine love mirrors God’s unconditional love. This becomes a testimony of His transforming power in our lives. So, when it comes to love, don’t just feel it, “Just Do It.”

+ + +

- **Love in Action.** Look for practical ways to show Christ’s love this week. Serve someone without being asked or meet a need without expecting gratitude or acknowledgment.
- **Encourage Without Recognition.** Speak words of hope to those around you. Offer compliments, write notes, or pray for others secretly. Let your encouragement honor Christ, not yourself.
- **Listen with Full Attention.** Give someone your undivided attention this week. Truly hear their heart, showing Christlike love that values others more than your own convenience.

DAILY READINGS

1. LOVE OR BUST// MATTHEW 22:36

Love is everywhere. There are books about love. Holidays dedicated to love. Television shows and stations portraying love 24 hours a day and 7 days of the week. People desire to be loved by going on blind dates and using phone apps to find love. What is so important about love? It is interesting that when the Pharisees tried to trick Jesus by asking him to name the greatest command in the law, Jesus responded with love. We have so many earthly loves and desires, but the foundation to everything we do is found in loving God and our neighbors. Set aside all the places you are seeking love and start with the right foundation.

Start with loving God and that love will extend to others.

2. WHAT IS LOVE?// ROMANS 5:8

Some ask the question, "How will I know when I am in love?" Falling in love for the first time can be confusing as two people try to figure out their relationship. The character of Christ paints a picture of love. Romans 5:8 reads, "But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Love is a commitment. Love endures. We can love when the other person does not deserve it. Love requires sacrifice. We can help young people and new believers understand love by teaching them Jesus's love for mankind through Scripture. When we understand genuine love from God, we are able to love well.

Seek to love like Jesus – unconditionally.

3. YOU DON'T GET TO CHOOSE // 1 CORINTHIANS 12:24

At the family reunion, I am amazed at what I see. I love my favorite auntie that always has thoughtful gifts or a couple of dollars to slip into my pocket. My crazy cousin makes me laugh until my sides hurt. But then, there is that one family member that ruins any party. You wish they would not show up, but they always do. Then I remember that I don't get to choose my family, God does. Well, the

same is true at church. There are members we love seeing every week that become like family. There are others that drive everyone crazy, and we want to avoid them. God has brought every member of the body together for His purposes so we can't play favorites. Pray and ask God to help you honor, love, and care for every member of your church.

Love the whole body of Christ.

4. STAY ON THE VINE// JOHN 15:5

Remember that growing for Christ requires remaining in Him. Sometimes we drift from our commitment to keep Jesus at the center of everything that we do. "The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me." Abiding is necessary order to have a fruitful life. If you find that you are not growing or bearing fruit for God's kingdom, check to see if God is still in the center of all your decisions and activities. If he is not, reorient yourself quickly. Scripture says without Him we can do nothing. Remaining is more than Sunday service participation or Wednesday night study. It is an ongoing, intentional time in His presence.

Maintain a strong relationship with God by connecting with Him daily.

5. DON'T FORGET YOUR FIRST LOVE// REVELATION 2:4

Remember how you put your best foot forward on a first date. Think back to how hard you worked during the first year on the job. You demonstrated real excitement when you started that hobby. We often start new things in our lives with great zeal and commitment; however, over time our commitments can wane. In Revelations 2:4 John addresses the church in Ephesus and tells them they have strayed from your love for the things of God. As we have studied the essentials of the Christian life, recommit to loving God and serving Christ with all of the energy and engagement you had when you began your Christian walk.

Allow the Holy Spirit to rekindle the fire from when you first believed.



Christian Living: Doing Life Together

PAM LILLY

I love family! I always have! I come from a big family with eight children and two loving parents. Growing up in a small town with cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents nearby created a large extended family. Coming together to celebrate holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries was a common practice for my family.

Growing up, I enjoyed being part of a small, close-knit church family. My church was close enough that I could walk to services, choir rehearsals, prayer meetings, and Bible studies. So, when I see the Apostle Paul referring to those in the Corinthian church as saints and brothers, I can definitely relate. If someone at my home church wasn't a natural aunt or uncle,

they were called Sister or Brother so-and-so. We shared life together, both in the community and in church. We truly were a family!

Paul, called as an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will, and Sosthenes our brother: To the church of God at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called as saints, with all those in every place who call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord—both their Lord and ours. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

When we place our faith in Jesus and become Christians, we not only become new creations but also become a part of God's family. As children of God—adopted into our Heavenly Father's family—we gain real brothers and sisters

in Christ Jesus, and we are to behave as a family, fellowshiping with one another.

Fellowship, when it concerns believers in Christ, has the same meaning as with family or friends. It is confusing to think that a different meaning should apply when talking about fellow believers. The same actions that show friendship or family ties should also be present in relationships among fellow believers — brothers and sisters in Christ.

Genuine relationships, friendships, and family unity require intentional effort and dedication. Likewise, fellowship with believers needs time, care, and intentionality, which are usually experienced through church attendance, serving in ministry, and participating in acts of kindness and outreach projects together.

Later, when I moved to the big city, a lot changed. My family and I joined a larger church, and we had to drive across downtown to attend services, extra services, and Bible study. The distance made fellowship with my church family difficult, and we started to feel distant and detached. Our children were unable to receive the biblical foundation that my husband and I enjoyed in our youth.

We would make one more move before settling into an even larger congregation, but the church was much closer to our home, which was a

huge advantage, especially for our children. Some of the children's teachers and even our doctor were members of our church, creating a strong sense of community. It was so easy for my children and me to make friends. It made singing in the choir, attending Bible study more regularly, and small group classes possible.

One thing I appreciate about fellowshiping with other believers is our shared values, our love for Jesus, and our reverence for the Word of God, which provides a common language and foundation. This helps us connect quickly, forming deep, rich, and meaningful relationships. Fellowship with believers can be warm and joyful because of God's grace. Among brothers and sisters in Christ, there is a strong desire to want what is best for each other.

"I always thank my God for you because of the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus, that you were enriched in him in every way, in all speech and all knowledge" (1 Cor. 13:4-5).

Additionally, we benefit from the prayer support of our church family, which often extends into acts of kindness and care that are usually only shown by family. When I think of my church family, my heart warms, and a sense of joy washes over me. Having been part of the same church for several decades has helped friendships grow into bonds as strong as family ties.





I recently received a message from a sweet sister in Christ whom I befriended at church many years ago. It started with: “To my Sister/Friend whom we dearly love...” along with hearts and smiley face emojis. Whether you’re part of a small, medium-sized, or mega church, in Christ, you can enjoy a life of fellowship with other believers. If this hasn’t been your experience, start doing life together by making friends one at a time.

These friendships can develop into a family that truly cares for one another. One sister or brother’s burdens become the concerns of other family members. We offer to pray for each other and do what we can to share both physical and spiritual burdens.

As stated in Hebrews 10:24-25, “let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.”

My friend and I can list many relationships like ours where we are doing life together. We pray for each other’s families, enjoy meals at each other’s homes, go out to dinner after church, and celebrate each other’s birthdays.

We get excited when there is a new baby or wedding in one another’s families. We are like sisters, and our husbands are close friends and brothers in Christ as well.

I know it can be hard to understand when we live such individual lives. However, we are part of God’s family, which includes brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as mothers and fathers in the faith—all a part of a wonderful Christian community.

So, let’s not allow division or separation to make us feel isolated and alone. Instead, let us be united in Christ Jesus, truly loving one another for His glory.

Pam Lilly is an ordained missionary, author, and nonprofit leader with over 15 years of experience in ministry and Biblical fundraising. She and her husband faithfully serve in children’s ministry and delight in spending time with their three adult children and six grandchildren.



"BE KIND AND
COMPASSIONATE
TO ONE ANOTHER,
FORGIVING ONE
ANOTHER, JUST
AS GOD ALSO
FORGAVE YOU
IN CHRIST."

Ephesians 4:32